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A

FUNERAL SERMON,

TO

THE MEMORY

OF

THE LATE

REV. WM. STEVENS, D.D.

Preached at Grosvenor Chapel, and at St. George's Church, Hanover Square, on Sunday, 12 Oct. 1800.

BY

THE REV. T. BASELEY, M.A.

PROPRIETOR OF GROSVENOR CHAPEL, AND CHAPLAIN TO THE RIGHT REV. THE LORD BISHOP OF LINCOLN.

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1800.

BRITISH MUSEUM

TO THE

NOBILITY, GENTRY,

AND THE REST OF THE INHABITANTS OF

ST. GEORGE'S HANOVER SQUARE,

THIS SERMON,

INTENDED AS A TRIBUTE OF RESPECT

TO THE MEMORY

OF THE LATE

DR. STEVENS,

WHO ENDEARED HIMSELF TO A NUMEROUS CIRCLE

OF FRIENDS,

BY HIS EXEMPLARY PIETY AND BENEVOLENCE

AS A CHRISTIAN,

NO LESS THAN BY HIS POLISHED MANNERS AND

EXTENSIVE ACQUIREMENTS AS

A GENTLEMAN AND A SCHOLAR,

IS MOST HUMBLY DEDICATED,

BY THEIR FAITHFUL AND OBLIGED SERVANT,

T. BASELEY.

BRITISH MUSEUM

PSALM lxxxix. VERSE 47.

"WHAT MAN IS HE THAT LIVETH AND SHALL "NOT SEE DEATH?"

THE words of the Text may be conſidered as an awful warning of the uncertainty of human life. They preſent to the mind a truth, of all others the moſt ſtriking and important, and yet the moſt eaſily neglected, or forgotten; a truth which daily experience familiarizes to the mind, and yet, of which we require to be continually admoniſhed. This *painful* re-

luctance to think and meditate on our latter end, or to eſtimate the gift of life as we *ought*, may derive ſome apology from the infirmities of our nature, and the goodneſs of God to his intelligent creatures, in this probationary world. The young are too often deterred from thinking of death by the conſideration that it will caſt a melancholy gloom over every enjoyment; as well as from the fulneſs of gratification, which they in general experience: and the aged are frequently ſo terrified at the near proſpect of the grave, as to indulge no thought, but that of enjoying what they have acquired a little and a little longer. So extenſive indeed are the mercies of our great Creator; the bleſſings of his Providence are ſo diverſified and ſo plentifully beſtowed,

ſtowed, that wiſe and good men have ſufficient cauſe to be grateful and contented during the time of their ſojourning in this ſtate of diſcipline: but it requires the aid of religion to render our meditations on the ſhortneſs and uncertainty of life intereſting, or profitable. When the fleeting forms of earthly happineſs vaniſh from our view, the eye of Chriſtian FAITH muſt be fixed on bleſſings commenſurate with the ſoul's capacity of enjoyment; and when the certainty of death preſſes on the mind, the rays of HOPE muſt enlighten the gloomy regions of the grave. The man of the world, the votary of pleaſure, and the ſlave of ſin, in baniſhing the thought of death, only ſhrink from miſery, or ſtrive to avoid a melancholy, conſtant dread, which, if indulged, would

border on *inſanity*. Confirmed in no ſyſtem of conduct but that of preſent gratification and promiſcuous enjoyment; neither Chriſtians, Infidels, nor Atheiſts, " they journey on in their way" careleſs of futurity, though framed for immortality; and when reminded of their latter end, by the untimely fate of others, or by the ſtronger call of danger to themſelves, they are left a prey to deſpondency and fear. The garlands of pleaſure wither on their brows, and never having cultivated the truths of religion, they ſhrink under its *terrors*, when they ſhould be cheered by its promiſes, and ſupported by its hopes. Such will be the unhappy ſtate of all who attempt, by their folly and their guilt, to thwart or pervert the grand plan of Divine Wiſdom; who would con-

fine

fine the views of an immortal creature to the fleeting enjoyments of this world; who forget that this is not our reſting-place, or home; who acknowledge not the mercies of God in calling us into another ſtate of exiſtence "eternal in the heavens," and who, in this life of diſcipline, which was calculated to improve us in wiſdom and in virtue, ſink into the grave with increaſe of folly only and of ſin.

It is owing, I fear, to want of ſufficient confidence in the promiſes of God, as much as to the natural frailty of human virtue, that many profeſſed Chriſtians do not conſider their latter end with that profitable attention, which it ſhould be their intereſt and their duty to do. Did they poſſeſs that religious hope which the Apoſtle calls "an anchor of the ſoul both

"ſure

" ſure and ſtedfaſt," they would find both their power to *do*, as well as *ſuffer*, wonderfully increaſed. Under every misfortune and calamity, reſignation would be leſs difficult and painful. The weakneſſes of human nature would not be ſo frequently urged as an excuſe for the omiſſion, or tranſgreſſion of duty; and knowing that " they muſt one day give an " account to Him that judgeth the quick " and dead," they would conſider his Divine Favour as the firſt object of human hope, and on all occaſions be ready " to " work out their ſalvation with fear and " trembling."—Let us endeavour to ſhew that we poſſeſs that lively ſenſe of religion, that firm belief in the promiſes of God, which ought at all times to regulate our thoughts, words, and actions, by rendering

our

our meditations on the text, practically uſeful. But the ſhortneſs and uncertainty of life ſhould neither deſtroy our rational comforts, impede our laudable purſuits, or abridge our virtuous enjoyments. This wiſe ordination of Providence, by which there is "no man that liveth and ſhall "not ſee death," was calculated to check thoughtleſſneſs and excite vigilance. It is admirably adapted to give that ſobriety, energy, and temperance to the mind, which are equally favourable to virtue, religion, and happineſs. It calls forth all the activity and exertion that we are capable of, and yet begets a calmneſs and moderation, which could ſcarcely ariſe from any other ſource. It ſerves moſt effectually on all occaſions to form our ſentiments and diſcipline our paſſions: but

but more particularly, when we ſee our fellow-creatures dropping into the grave around us, ſome "cut down like the "flower of the field," before its bloſſoms were fully diſcloſed; others before they had well reached the meridian of life, and ſome, like the patriarch Abraham, "full of "years and of a good old age;" we muſt be deaf to the voice of prudence as well as duty, not to hear the awful warning of religion: "Watch, therefore, for ye "know neither the day, nor the hour "wherein the Son of Man cometh"; and "learn ſo to number our days, that we "may apply our hearts unto wiſdom."

When particular events of this nature may be wanting to rouſe our attention; or when, from frequent repetition, they may in ſome meaſure have loſt their intereſt,

intereſt, let the contemplation of death enforce the obſervance of *general* duties, and the importance of *well-known* truths. Let it, for inſtance, impreſs us with the true uſe and *ineſtimable value of time*. Knowing that we have not long to live, let it teach us to huſband and improve our talent to the beſt advantage. By avoiding the ſnares and temptations of idleneſs, we not only ſhun the guilt which muſt attend a laviſh waſte of time, but eſcape the miſery of thoſe ſinful paſſions to which it often leads. Let us remember that the hour which fleets away without a thought, and the year that creeps on without improvement to ourſelves, or benefit to others, will never return that we may make a better uſe of them; and hereafter, when we ſhall languiſh on the

bed

bed of ſickneſs or of death, thoſe portions of time only will be thought of with pleaſure, that were ſpent in the rational purſuits of wiſdom and of happineſs; or in the faithful diſcharge of our duty towards God and towards man. All elſe, except what is devoted to the neceſſary refreſhments of nature, will be conſidered as *loſt treaſure* that muſt be accounted for; or as a bleſſing which we have perverted to a *condemnation* and a *curſe*.

Next to abſolute idleneſs, let the contemplation of death guard us againſt the folly and the danger of a fickle and irreſolute temper; or the habitual weakneſs of acting to no purpoſe. Let it teach us, according to the ſituation of life in which (by Divine Providence) we may be placed, to make a timely and a

prudent

prudent choice;—at leaſt, ſo far as we have the means and opportunity; and then let it impreſs us with the advantage and neceſſity of conſtancy and perſeverance.

While others are ſquandering life away without any benefit to themſelves or others, but rather injuring all around them; while from the folly of a weak, unſettled mind, they are ſhifting from object to object, and quitting one purſuit for another, always *beginning*, as though they ſhould never come to an *end*; let us remember the ancient maxim, that "Art is long and life is ſhort;"—that man has not *time* for many purſuits, even though he had *powers*; and that to whatever objects he directs his attention, induſtry and firmneſs are productive of certain *good*, idleneſs and inconſtancy

ſtancy of certain *evil*. But the remembrance of our latter end, though it ſhould lead us to make a proper uſe of our time, ought alſo to guard us moſt effectually againſt the fooliſh and extravagant projects of pride and ambition. Some men are ſo blind to their own happineſs, and ſo ignorant of themſelves, as to be continually thwarting their own views, and counteracting their own purpoſes. From an intemperate zeal, that inflames without enlightening them, they often do *miſchief* where they intended *good*;—they experience diſappoinment, where they expected gratification; and from graſping too eagerly at the *ſhadow* of happineſs, embrace nothing in *ſubſtance* but miſery. The contemplation of death would ſoberize their expectations,

and

and regulate all their paſſions; it would teach ambition to ſoar a moderate flight, and diſarm futurity (with relation to this life) of half its terrors. Under the eagerneſs of deſire, it would tell us not to "truſt to the morrow," and under the uſeleſs dread of misfortune, it would teach us to believe that, "ſufficient unto "the day is the evil thereof."

This leads me to conſider another general uſe to which the intereſting, and awful ſubject of our preſent meditation, may be applied; namely, the moderation of all our paſſions with regard to the things of this life, and a proper eſtimate of every thing that ſurrounds us in this world of diſcipline. Aſſured that "we are but ſtrangers "and pilgrims here, as all our fathers "were," why ſhould we be ſurpriſed that

the tranſitory bleſſings of our preſent ſtate ſhould leave *us*, or we leave *them*, and be no longer ſeen? To die is as natural, as it is to be born; and if we, who only occupy this frail tenement of the body for a few years, at moſt, think and act as though we were to keep perpetual poſſeſſion, we have only to accuſe our own blindneſs and folly. This conſideration is not of a partial nature; but would, if properly improved, extend its influence over the whole mind. It would ſubdue the extravagance of hope and fear; it would mitigate the anguiſh of grief and diſappointment; and, by combining with all our motives and principles of action, it would promote every *virtuous*, and check every *vicious* propenſity of our nature. There is nothing ſcarcely in this life, that does not ſerve (by the

wiſe

wiſe ordination of Providence) to produce that ſobriety of expectation and enjoyment which religion inculcates, and that would not lead us to place our hopes of *perfect* happineſs in heaven. The loſs of health, and the ſufferings of diſeaſe, are among the commoneſt evils of mortality; riches, even when acquired, often "make "themſelves wings and fly away;" and as to our expectations of other worldly advantages, they may be fruſtrated by a thouſand accidents. The hand of Divine Wiſdom ſtops not here; becauſe all this would be inſufficient to wean our affections from things below, and fix them with any ſerioufneſs, or conſtancy, on things above: but thoſe ſalutary effects which the ordinary occurrences of life *begin* to produce, the power of death

ſeems admirably calculated to extend and *perfect*. The ſtrong holds of all our earthly happineſs are attacked in every direction, and, ſooner or later, are ſure to be *demoliſhed:* the ties of friendſhip and affection; under whatever endearing relation they may be formed; whether they ſubſiſt between parent and child, huſband and wife, (or, to mention not the leaſt intereſting and deſirable connection, which a late melancholy event ſuggeſts, that between a Miniſter and his people) they muſt all be inevitably diſſolved; and, unleſs "we embrace, and "ever hold faſt the bleſſed hope of ever-"laſting life;" the diſſolution will leave us a prey to fruitleſs and deſpondent ſorrow. We are taught, therefore, not only by the ſtrange viciſſitudes that happen

pen in the world, but from the common events of life, to conſider that whatever treaſures the goodneſs of God may beſtow on us in our preſent ſtate; whether they ariſe from the ſucceſsful purſuits of fame, of wealth, and honours, or ſpring from the purer and more delightful ſources of friendſhip, gratitude, and affection; we carry them (to uſe the language of the Apoſtle) in "earthen veſſels." They are often broken and deſtroyed therefore while we watch over them with the greateſt anxiety; and ſometimes while we ſleep in perfect ſecurity, dreaming only of conſtant poſſeſſion, they are taken for ever from us. Every thing conſpires to remind us of our mortality, and bids us prepare for that awful change which we know muſt take place. The

daily occurrences that reach our ears, or fall within the circle of our own experience, may well induce us to " ponder " the path of life," and force upon the mind meditations on death and futurity. —But if theſe are inſufficient, let *us* remember that the warning voice of religion has lately called aloud. The recent death of our late *moſt excellent Teacher* might well alarm the thoughtleſs, and terrify the guilty; and yet however awful, there is nothing new or uncommon in it. Few there are, who have not had the ſame melancholy experience impreſſed on their minds before, by almoſt ſimilar events; and happening perhaps within the circle of their *friends* and *families*. The wonder is, that they ſhould ever be forgotten, or that, taken with other motives

tives, they ſhould ever ceaſe to influence our ſentiments and conduct. The facts are ſo awfully intereſting, one ſhould ſuppoſe, to every human being, that the warning which they give needs not the amplifications of eloquence, nor the laboured deductions of reaſon. Hear it then ye thoughtleſs ſons of indolence and pleaſure, and tremble for your ſafety.—Hear it ye ambitious men of the world, and learn the vanity and folly of your purſuits.—Hear it ye unrepentant ſinners, and " rend your hearts, and turn unto " the Lord your God."

Under theſe awful viſitations of Divine Providence, ſo powerful and extenſive are the charms of virtue, and ſuch are the riches of Divine Love, that we feel a melancholy ſatisfaction in dwelling on the

worth which we have loſt, and the integrity which we once highly valued. The remembrance of departed goodneſs is fondly cheriſhed in the boſom of thoſe who chiefly feel its loſs; and there it mingles *comfort* with the *tears* of *affectionate ſorrow*.—In offering our humble tribute of eſteem to the memory of Dr. STEVENS, let us endeavour to render our remembrance of his worth, and our ſorrow for his loſs, *profitable to ourſelves*: for this will be the moſt acceptable ſervice to him. Let us emulate the many virtues of his heart that claimed our love;—let us reverence the piety that ſhone through a long life as a light unto our paths;—and let the contemplation of the varied and extenſive excellence which diſtinguiſhed his manners, and his acquirements as a Chriſtian and a ſcholar,

be

be long, long preſent to our minds, as a bright example to animate our utmoſt efforts in the purſuit of every thing that is truly wiſe and good. If it ſhould be our fate to live like him, to a "good "old age," may we learn to copy his meek and humble reſignation to the will of God, during the langour of diſeaſe which threatened the ſlow, but ſure approach of death, and thoſe acute ſufferings of bodily pain, which rendered it the ſevereſt trial of humanity in this world of diſcipline and ſorrow. May the Chriſtian temper be ſo thoroughly formed in us, as to enable us, like him, on every trying occaſion, "to poſſeſs our ſouls in patience." May it be in us, what it was ſo eminently in our departed brother, a conſpicuous ornament and firm ſupport to

every

every virtue that endears us to our fellow-creatures, and that will hereafter make our peace with God; communicating to all our ſentiments, and caſting over the whole of our conduct a ſort of gracious influence, that beſpeaks the meekneſs, the gentleneſs, and godly ſincerity of Chriſtian love, unmixed with any of the diſſimulation, or ſpurious politeneſs of the world.

We may indeed regret the loſs of ſuch a *living* example—but all regret is vain; and fruitleſs are the tears that fall in ſilent, ſolitary anguiſh, unleſs they nouriſh "the good ſeed" which religion has previouſly ſown in the mind. "We ſhall go "to *Him*, but he will not return to *us*." No longer ſhall we hear the words of divine truth uttered with the ſtrongeſt conviction, and the mildeſt accents of perſuaſion, from this

this ſacred place; which I (an unworthy ſucceſſor) now fill. No longer ſhall we witneſs his fervent, but rational and enlightened piety, nor be charmed with the ſuavity of his manners as one of its choiceſt fruits. No longer ſhall we ſhare the ineſtimable benefits of his *perſonal* friendſhip, nor hear that "living voice," which, with ſuch pleaſure and ſuch rare facility, communicated to all around him the rich gifts of learning and experience, as well as revealed the oracles, and adminiſtered the conſolations of divine truth. But if we look up with the reverence that is due to his exalted character, and with a ſincere deſire to emulate his worth, it may be ſaid that "though "dead, yet he ſtill liveth." We ſhall be conformed unto him, and walk, as

far

far as we have the power, in his foot-ſteps.

In addition to all the other duties which the remembrance of his example muſt enforce, let the awful change which death has produced, teach us to " paſs the time of " our ſojourning in fear." The inevitable fate that has happened to him, and that muſt happen to all, may ſoon be ours.—May we learn from this therefore, and ſimilar events, the important leſſon of ſo " paſſing through things *temporal*, that *we* " finally loſe not things *eternal*." Let us at all times remember, that we are *immortal* and *accountable* creatures. Let this ſingle conſideration enforce the conſtant duties of vigilance and prayer to our Almighty Father; that we may " grow in " grace, and in that knowledge which may

" make

" make us wiſe unto ſalvation." May this world, with all its paſſions, cares, anxieties, and purſuits, be *ſubordinate* to the *awful* concerns of eternity, and derive their importance only from the effect they may probably have on our happineſs hereafter; ſo that when the hour of our departure ſhall arrive, we may reſemble thoſe good ſervants in the Goſpel, who when their Lord unexpectedly came, were found watching. Now to God, &c.

FINIS.

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